

James Madison to Margaret H. Smith, September 21, 1830. Transcription: The Writings of James Madison, ed. Gaillard Hunt. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1900-1910.

TO MARGARET B. SMITH.¹

1 Copy of the original among the family papers of the late J. Henley Smith, Esq., of Washington. On the same subject Madison wrote to Henry St. George Tuckner, April 30, 1830, giving the same information and adding:

"Mr. Jefferson's letters to me amount to hundreds. But they have not been looked into for a long time, with the exception of a few of latter dates. As he kept copies of all his letters throughout the period, the originals of those to me exist of course elsewhere.

"My eye fell on the inclosed paper. It is already in obscurity, and may soon be in oblivion. The Ceracchi named was an artist celebrated for his genius, & was thought a rival in embryo to Canova & doomed to the guillotine as the author or patron, guilty or suspected, of the infernal machine for destroying Bonaparte. I knew him well, having been a lodger in the same house with him, and much teased by his eager hopes on wch I constantly threw cold water, of obtaining the aid of Congress for his grand project. Having failed in this chance, he was advised by me & others to make the experiment of subscriptions, with the most auspicious names heading the list, and considering the general influence of Washington and the particular influence of Hamilton on the corps of speculators then suddenly enriched by the funding system, the prospect was encouraging. But just as the circular address was about to be despatched, it was put into his head that the scheme, was merely to get rid of his importunities, and being of the genus irritabile, suddenly went

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off in anger and disgust, leaving behind him heavy drafts on Genl. W. Mr. Jefferson &c. &c. for the busts &c. he had presented to them. His drafts were not the effect of avarice, but of his wants, all his resources having been exhausted in the tedious pursuit of his object. He was an enthusiastic worshipper of Liberty and Fame, and his whole soul was bent on securing the latter by rearing a monument to the Former, which he considered as personified in the American Republic. Attempts were made to engage him for a statue of Genl. W. but he wd. not stoop to that.”— *Mad. Mss.* The enclosure was Ceracchi's circular concerning his proposed monument. A photograph of his bust of Madison is the frontispiece of this edition of his writings.

Montpellier, September, 1830.

I have received, my dear Madam, your very friendly, and I must add, very flattering letter; in which you wish, from my own hand, some reminiscence marking the early relations between Mr. Jefferson and myself, and involving some anecdote concerning him that may have a place in a manuscript volume you are preparing as a legacy for your son.

I was a stranger to Mr. Jefferson till the year 1776, when he took his seat in the first Legislature under the constitution of Virginia then newly formed; being at the time myself a member of that Body, and for the first time a member of any public Body. The acquaintance then made with him was very slight; the distance between our ages being considerable, and other distances much more so. During part of the time whilst he was Governour of the State, a service to which he was called not long after, I had a seat in the Council associated with him. Our acquaintance there became intimate; and a friendship was formed, which was for life, and which was never interrupted in the slightest degree for a single moment.

Among the occasions which made us immediate companions was the trip in 1791, to the borders of Canada to which you refer. According to an understanding between us, the observations in our way through the Northern part of N. York, and the newly settled

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entirety of Vermont, to be noted by him, were of a miscellaneous cast, and were in part at least noted on the Birch bark of which you speak. The few observations devolving on me, related chiefly to agricultural and economic objects. On recurring to them, I find the only interest they contain is in the comparison they may afford of the infant state with the present growth of the settlements through which we passed, and I am sorry that my memory does not suggest any particular anecdote to which yours must have alluded. The scenes & subjects which had occurred during the session of Congress which had just terminated at our departure from New York, entered of course into our itinerary conversations.

In one of those scenes, a dinner party at which we were both present, I recollect an incident now tho' not perhaps adverted to then, which as it is characteristic of Mr. Jefferson, I will substitute for a more exact compliance with your request.

The new Constitution of the U. States having just been put into operation, forms of Government were the uppermost topics every where, more especially at a convivial board, and the question being started as to the best mode of providing the Executive chief, it was among other opinions, boldly advanced that a hereditary designation was preferable to any elective process that could be devised.

At the close of an eloquent effusion against the agitations and animosities of a popular choice and in behalf of birth, as on the whole, affording even a better chance for a suitable head of the Government, Mr. Jefferson, with a smile remarked that he had heard of a university somewhere in which the Professorship of Mathematics was hereditary. The reply, received with acclamation, was a coup de grace to the Anti-Republican Heretic.

Whilst your affection is preparing, from other sources, an instructive bequest for your son, I must be allowed to congratulate him on the precious inheritance he will enjoy in the examples on which his filial feelings will most delight to dwell.

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Mrs. Madison failed to obtain the two points she intended for you; but will renew her efforts to fulfil her promise. The only drawing of our House is that by Dr Thornton, and is without the wings now making part of it.

Be pleased, my dear Madam, to express to Mr. Smith the particular esteem I have ever entertained for the lights of his mind, and the purity of his principles; and to accept for him, & yourself my cordial salutations. Mrs. Madison who has lately been seriously ill, but is now recovering, desires me to assure you of her affectionate friendship, and joins me in wishing for the entire circle of your family, every happiness.